

# AMSD

# CONNECTIONS

News and Updates from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

December 2009  
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## AMSD Calendar

**December 18, 2009**  
**Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting,**  
7:30 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul

**January 8, 2010**  
**Legislative Preview**  
**8:00 AM—10:00 AM**  
Grand Hall, TIES Building,  
St. Paul

**January 26, 2010**  
**8:00 AM—2:30 PM**  
**2010 AMSD Winter Conference**  
**Online Learning-Fad or Future?**  
Grand Hall, TIES Building,  
St. Paul

**January 29, 2010**  
**Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting,**  
7:30 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul

## AMSD's Mission

*To advocate for state education policy that enables metropolitan school districts to improve student learning.*



**Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts**

## AMSD Advocacy Workshop a Success!



Over 80 people attended AMSD's advocacy workshop on November 10 making the event a huge success. Pictured at left is Robbie LaFleur, director of the legislative reference library, as she offers an overview of the legislative web site. Other topics included: how to communicate effectively with legislators, developing consistent messages, building support in the local business community, and conducting effective legislative forums.

## From the Chair:

**T**he recently released state budget forecast was sobering to say the least. It is clear that bold action is needed to stabilize the state's broken fiscal system. Minnesota school districts are heavily reliant on state funding. While other units of local government have some ability to raise revenue to address their local challenges, school districts are largely at the mercy of state government.

While the steep national recession has contributed significantly to the state's budget shortfall, Minnesota has faced budget challenges almost every year since the state eliminated the general education levy and reduced other state taxes a decade ago. According to data from the Property Tax Study Project, real per pupil state aid cuts have amounted to 10.7% since 2003! This funding squeeze has occurred at the same time expectations for our schools continue to rise.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the state will not be able to fulfill its obligation to fund our schools in the near term. Consequently, the AMSD legislative platform calls on legislators and the governor to grant temporary, discretionary levy authority to locally elected school boards to help get through these extremely challenging times.

While such a solution may not be the first choice for many legislators or school board members, it may be the only way to prevent extremely painful cuts to school district budgets. Students, educators and the people of Minnesota are looking for our state policymakers to provide the bold leadership that is needed to guide our state through this budget challenge. AMSD board members stand ready to assist in this critical work.

*Jon Tynjala, school board member from Mounds View, is chair of AMSD.*

## Vision of performing arts school becomes reality in Burnsville-Eagan-Savage

**I**t was too good an opportunity to pass up.

The City of Burnsville was constructing a new performing arts center at the same time that the Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District was designing magnet schools as part of its joint integration plan with the neighboring Lakeville school district.

"If we hadn't decided to move ahead, someone else would have," said Superintendent Randy Clegg. "It was an obvious setting for a school focused on the performing arts."

Thus, after a year of planning, the school district's Envision Academy of the Arts opened in September 2009 with 70 students in grades 9-11, expanding to grade 12 next year.

Envision students commit to an extended school day, starting with five periods at Burnsville High School where they take core classes and one elective. This gives them the chance to experience rigorous courses through Advanced Placement and College in the Schools through the University of Minnesota. After lunch, students are transported one mile to the Burnsville Performing Arts Center (PAC) for four more periods immersed in dance, theater and music instruction with certified teachers who are also professionals in their fields.

The PAC has proven to be the perfect setting for a performing arts school. It is a remarkable facility with a 1,000-seat theater with proscenium stage, along with a 150-seat black box. The school utilizes the dance studio as well as two larger classrooms and has access to the stages, dressing rooms, etc. The school benefits from tie-ins with performers booked at the PAC. For example, students recently met with Hollywood actress and writer Amber Tamblyn and they had the opportunity to audition for an off-Broadway holiday musical.

"We started with a blank slate -- new students, teachers new to the district, new building and new program," said Kevin Berdine, music teacher. "It is amazing what we have been able to accomplish."

Envision's first theater production, Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," recently took place. Students began playing string instruments in October and will interact with professional musicians from the Minnesota Orchestra. Dance students are involved in a collaboration with the James Sewell Ballet company.

Auditions are not required to attend Envision, and students need not be experts in the performing arts. However, they must have a strong interest in developing their talents.

In a recent focus group of Envision students, many commented how good it feels to be in a school with other students and teachers who are as passionate about the arts as they are.

"From the very first day, Envision has felt like a family," said student Marie Kartheiser. She has dreamed all her life of being a "Triple Threat" (singer, dancer and actor). "Now I have that opportunity," she said.

Of the 70 Envision students, 23 are from other school districts while 24 are students of color. The goal is to increase enrollment to 125 for the 2010-11 school year.

"The program created at Envision has exceeded our expectations," said Dave Helke, principal of Burnsville High School. "It's another way for us to meet the unique learning needs of our students."

At the same time Envision opened, the district also debuted three other magnet programs -- a gifted/talented elementary school as well as elementary and junior high school STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) programs. The Board of Education recently voted to move forward with a junior high gifted/talented program to open next fall.



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# AMSD 2010 Winter Conference

## On-Line Learning: Fad or Future?

### January 26, 2010

AMSD's 2010 Winter Conference will be held on Tuesday, January 26, 2010, at the Grand Hall in the TIES Building. This year's conference is titled, "**Online Learning - Fad or Future?**" Gary Lopez will be the keynote speaker at the conference. Mr. Lopez is the executive director of the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education. He is the past CEO of NETg, one of the leading providers of e-learning solutions to many of the largest companies in the world including Shell, IBM, AT&T, Honeywell, and Motorola. Under his leadership, NETg developed a library of more than 1,200 multimedia-based courses. Currently, he is leading development of the National Repository of Online Courses (NROC) and Hippocampus, a free resource for creating customized online curriculum. Mr. Lopez will provide a national perspective on the current landscape and future opportunities for online learning.



The keynote address will be followed by four panel discussions made up of local teachers, administrators, students and state policymakers addressing the learning environment in Minnesota. The two morning sessions will focus on programs currently in place at local school districts and existing resources available to school districts. The afternoon sessions will explore various policy issues at both the local and state level that impact online learning.

With the State facing very difficult budget challenges, the conference aims to help school leaders identify the many resources that are available that have the potential to help school districts provide new learning opportunities in a cost effective manner. An additional goal is to identify state policy changes that may be needed to help school districts take advantage of these exciting opportunities.

**"The program created at Envision has exceeded our expectations."  
Burnsville High School Principal Dave Helke**

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All magnet programs will be reviewed next year by an outside evaluator to determine their effectiveness, said Clegg. In addition, surveys and/or focus groups with students and families are planned.

The Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District receives about \$1.4 million a year in integration funding -- 70% from the state and 30% through a local levy. In addition, grants have been received for specific purposes such as the start-up of the strings program and for training for STEM teachers at the Science Museum of Minnesota.

For more information on magnet programs, contact Eileen Abrahamson at 952-707-2077.

*This month's member spotlight was submitted Ruth Dunn, Communications Coordinator, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Public Schools..*



Instructor Jill Patterson leads a dance class at Envision Academy of the Arts.

## AMSD Board Adopts Legislative Platform

The recently released State Budget Forecast projects a \$1.2 billion deficit for the current biennium and a \$5.4 billion deficit for the 2012-13 biennium. Clearly, state lawmakers face considerable challenges in addressing these staggering budget shortfalls.

The AMSD platform acknowledges these enormous budget challenges and at the same time recognizes that school districts have already made significant budget reductions and staff layoffs to deal with a state funding freeze and aid payment deferrals. The AMSD platform focuses on 3 areas: stabilizing education funding, enhancing local control and establishing an education research center.

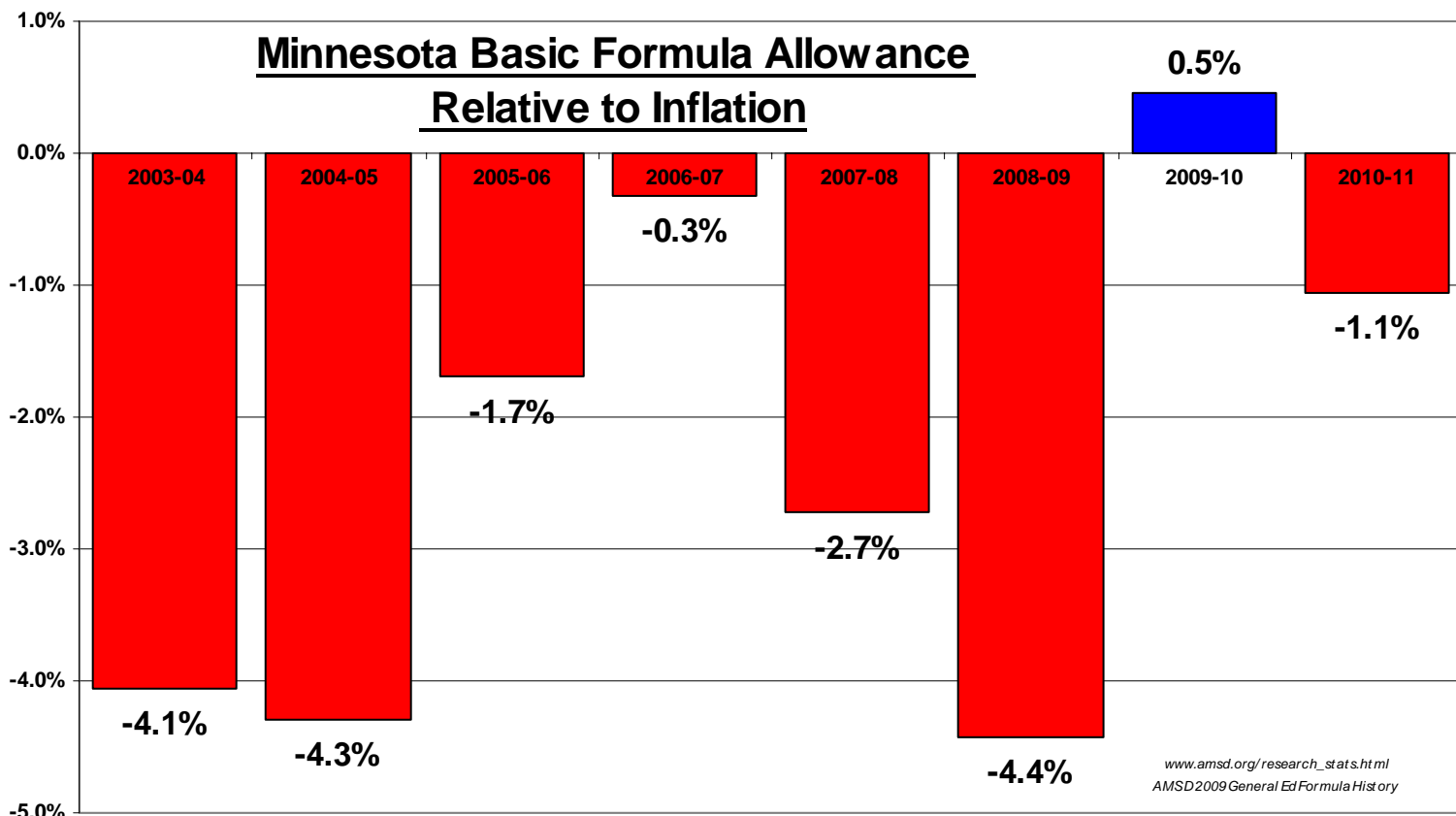
### Stabilize Funding for Schools

AMSD member districts made over \$82 million in budget cuts for the 2009-10 school year including laying off almost 900 staff. It is critical that the Governor and Legislature take steps to stabilize education funding in the short-term and into the future. Specifically, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Adopt a schedule to phase in comprehensive education funding reform based on the New Minnesota Miracle framework
- Grant locally elected school boards temporary, discretionary levy authority until the state budget is stabilized and education funding reform is enacted
- Allow renewal of existing operating and capital projects referenda by a majority vote of the school board

The chart below shows how funding for the basic formula allowance, the most critical component of the general education funding formula, has not kept pace with inflation for many years.

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# AMSD 2010 Legislative Platform

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### Enhance Local Control

In these extremely challenging times, the Governor and Legislature should enhance local control and reduce cost pressures by implementing a moratorium on any new mandates and repealing or temporarily waiving existing mandates that are not funded or outdated. Examples of actions the Governor and Legislature can take to enhance local control and provide relief to local school districts include but are not limited to:

- Eliminate the maintenance of effort requirement for safe schools revenue
- Remove the penalty for not reaching contract settlements by January 15
- Replace the requirement for a minimum number of student contact days to a comparable number of student contact hours
- Repeal the requirement that school districts negotiate the number and identity of 403(b) vendors
- Allow school districts to publish board minutes and budget information on their web site with a notice in the newspaper stating the web address where the information can be found
- Allow school districts that transport charter school and nonpublic school students to charge for the full cost of transporting students to their sites
- Allow students who have failed the computerized version of the GRAD Reading Test the option of retaking the test in a paper/pencil format
- Repeal the prohibition of starting the school year prior to Labor Day

### Establish an Education Research Center

The Governor and Legislature should establish a non-partisan, independent Education Research Center. The Center should be charged with analyzing, conducting and disseminating research on emerging education issues and serving as a clearing house to share best practices information. The Educational Research Center could:

- Conduct research and make recommendations for enhancing the state's accountability system
- Analyze existing research studies and develop recommendations on critical emerging issues such as on-line learning
- Analyze data collected through the developing state longitudinal data system and identify best practices to increase student achievement
- Identify and disseminate best practices in the area of shared services and local collaboration

Minnesota faces a historic budget challenge that is threatening the state's ability to develop the productive and educated workforce needed to compete in today's global economy. Our ability to compete nationally and internationally is dependent on building a highly-educated workforce. State policymakers need to act strategically in both the short-term and the long-term if Minnesota is to successfully emerge from the worldwide recession. It is critical that state policymakers balance the state budget while simultaneously laying the ground work to invest in human capital and reform our education funding system.

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**AMSD Members:** Anoka-Hennepin, Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville, Columbia Heights, East Metro Integration District 6067, Eden Prairie, Edina, Elk River, Fridley, Hopkins, Intermediate District 287, Intermediate District 917 (Associate Member), Inver Grove Heights, Mahtomedi, Minneapolis, MSU Mankato Center for Engaged Leadership (Associate Member), Minnetonka, Mounds View, Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916 (Associate Member), North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale, Orono, Osseo Area Schools, Richfield, Robbinsdale, Roseville, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan, Shakopee, South St. Paul, Spring Lake Park, St. Anthony/New Brighton, St. Cloud, St. Louis Park, St. Paul, Stillwater, TIES (Associate Member), Wayzata, West Metro Education Program, West St. Paul, and White Bear Lake.